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SECURITY INFORMATION

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

30 December 1952

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 299

SUBJECT: Recent Developments in French North Africa

1. The recent disturbances in North Africa confirm the NIE-69 forecast of increasing nationalist unrest. UN consideration of the Tunisian issue generated great excitement in Tunisia and Morocco which, after the assassination of Tunisian union leader Hached, flared into mob violence in Morocco early in December. French security forces acted quickly to bring the situation under control in both areas. The French are currently attempting to impose a political settlement on the Bey of Tunis and Sultan of Morocco and will probably have at least temporary success.

2. Events in Tunisia. As anticipated by the French, discussion of the Tunisian problem in the UN was accompanied by increased nationalist acts of violence, designed to support the Arab-Asian contention that the Tunisian problem was a "threat to world peace." The most notable casualty was Farhat Hached, the chief active Tunisian nationalist leader, who was found murdered on 4 December. The details of the crime probably will remain obscure. Three groups are almost equally likely to have committed it: (a) French extremists, who had threatened to take the law into their own hands; (b) Communists; and (c) other nationalists, among whom Hached had jealous rivals. Of these groups, the Communists had by far the most to gain and the French the most to lose from Hached's death, but many observers feel French extremists are the most likely culprits.

3. The French have taken most of the nationalist leaders into custody, ostensibly to insure their safety, and have isolated the Bey of Tunis from his unofficial advisory council. They have pressured the Bey into signing portions of their previously rejected reform program and have received his promise of further cooperation. But the

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French have removed from the political scene the very leaders with whom France must negotiate if any realistic settlement is to be achieved. The nationalists are unlikely to support the Bey's decision to cooperate with France, and will continue to fight any French-imposed reforms.


4. Moroccan Developments. The UN debate also increased tensions in French Morocco, where the likelihood of violence is greater than in Tunisia. Hached's death evoked a Moroccan CGT strike call, to protest what was termed the "French-influenced" assassination. By noon of 8 December rioting had occurred throughout Casablanca. French reprisals were swift and well designed. The strongest nationalist party, the Istiqlal, was outlawed and hundreds of its leaders, as well as a number of Communists, were arrested. The French gave an impressive display of armed strength. Outbreaks subsided by 13 December but the situation remains tense and new incidents are expected.

5. Although the French have stated that Communists were largely responsible for the Moroccan riots, there is little evidence to support this view. Communists may have provided the spark for the conflagration and encouraged its growth, but the groundwork had been laid by the Istiqlal Party. A respected French official recently stated that the Moroccan Communist Party had already been deprived of its leadership and wholly disorganized by French arrests over the past year and a half.

6. French security capabilities. Recent developments in North Africa have demonstrated the determination and ability of the French to retain control of their protectorates. The sporadic sabotage and violence in Tunisia and the rioting in Morocco have not required full commitment of French North African security forces. Furthermore, there has been no indication of any significant increase in the limited nationalist paramilitary capabilities.

7. The French probably will use the riots to exert pressure on the Sultan to approve measures authorizing French "colon" participation in local Moroccan Government. While the Sultan is likely to prove more stubborn than the Bey of Tunis, the recent demonstration of French readiness to employ force probably will convince him that if he is to avoid deposition, he must accede to French demands. Moreover, following the noncommittal UN resolutions on Tunisia and Morocco neither the Sultan nor Bey can look to the UN for support, at least in the near future.

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